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SUBJECT: DHI QAR MARKET BOMBING: PRIME SUSPECTS BELIEVED TO BE AQI-AFFILIATED; PRT TRAINING CENTER TREATS VICTIMS

(U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified; handle accordingly. Not for distribution on the Internet.

**¶1.** (SBU) Summary: The explosion of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) at the vegetable market in Al-Bathaa on June 10 claimed 19 lives and 81 wounded. The Dhi Qar police chief attributed the bomb to an Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) cell operating "from a different province" and announced the detention of two suspects. Police used warning shots to disperse a spontaneous demonstration against alleged police negligence in failing to deal with the illegally parked car housing the bomb. At the request of provincial authorities, Nasiriyah referred four patients on June 10 to the PRT's Mittica Training Center for stabilization before being transferred to Baghdad. Provincial authorities responded with an unexpected coordinated and decisive response that may constitute a favorable precedent for addressing Dhi Qar's problems. End summary.

Market Bombing

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**¶2.** (U) A VBIED exploded at a busy vegetable market in the town of Al-Bathaa, Dhi Qar province, at 9:00 a.m. on June 10. The Department of Health reported on June 11 that the official toll is 19 people killed and 81 wounded, mainly women and children who had been shopping at the market. This was the largest violent loss of life in Dhi Qar since the bombing of an Italian military post in 2003 killed 26 people. Authorities sent most of the wounded to Nasiriyah General Hospital, but medical facilities in Muthanna province, at COB Adder and the Mobile Surgical Unit at Dhi Qar PRT's Mittica training center also received the injured.

Reaction

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**¶3.** (SBU) En route to a meeting with the Governor at the time of the explosion, PRT Team Leader and 4/1 Armoned Division BCT Commander followed the Governor and the Provincial Chief of Police to the site. Shortly after the blast, a crowd of distraught citizens, believing that the police had failed to act on warnings from witnesses about a suspicious vehicle, staged a spontaneous protest. PRT staff witnessed police firing guns to break up the crowd of several dozens as it advanced on the police, reportedly injuring one man. (Comment: Short-lived in itself, the confrontation could affect the popular perception of the Police Chief or Governor, depending upon whether the public holds police officers of the Governor's security detail responsible for the gunplay. End comment.)

**¶4.** (SBU) Confident that local hospitals could handle the incident, the provincial Director General of Health declined the PRT's offer for additional supplies. Late on June 10, however, Nasiriyah Hospital authorities dispatched to the Mittica mobile surgical unit four patients with burns, head trauma and other injuries requiring stabilization before evacuation to Baghdad. The U.S. military also received five

victims, one of whom died.

Police Accuse Al-Qaeda

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¶5. (SBU) The Provincial Police Chief said publicly that the bombing was the work of an Al-Qaeda Iraq cell operating from "a different province." (An unidentified police official quoted in the local media claimed the attackers had come from Mosul.) The Police Chief said two people had been arrested, including the suspected triggerman. Earlier press speculation also pointed to Sunnis displaced from Nasiriyah or disgruntled Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) supporters seeking to discredit the new Da'wa-run government, but presented no evidence to support these claims. The Bathaa police chief was either suspended by the provincial QBathaa police chief was either suspended by the provincial Chief of Police pending a review of the incident or fired by the Governor, depending on the source. On June 11, Minister for National Security Shirwan al-Waili visited Nasiriyah to discuss the incident with the Provincial Council. Nasiriyah's most prominent religious leader, Sheikh Nasri, condemned the "cowardly" attack publicly and called for unity in face of the bloodshed.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Whether there is any evidence to support the quick early arrests of suspects remains to be seen. If charges hold, the rapid arrest would be a coup for Police Chief Sabah, who is strongly supported by the Prime Minister. Low-level violence occurs in Dhi Qar but the indiscriminate targeting of large numbers of civilians is unheard of. The rarity of incidents such as this bombing makes plausible local claims that the blast was the work of an outside

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network like Al-Qaeda. Since the new Governor and Council took power, turf-building and egos had distracted Dhi Qar's new leadership from grappling fully with the province's fundamental issues. The tragedy in Al-Bathaa produced among the province's leaders a short-term common, coordinated and decisive response that bodes well for future cooperation.  
End comment.

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